

## Letter to the Editor

## Male-to-female transsexual subtypes: Sexual arousal with cross-dressing and physical measurements

In a recent article, [Smith et al. \(2005\)](#) confirmed the findings of several previous investigators that there are two distinct subtypes of male-to-female (MF) transsexuals, homosexual and nonhomosexual, with distinctly different clinical presentations and probably with different etiologies. Homosexual MF transsexuals, who are exclusively sexually attracted to men, report considerable childhood femininity and rarely give a history of sexual arousal with cross-dressing. Nonhomosexual MF transsexuals, who may be sexually attracted to women, to women and men, or to persons of neither sex, report less childhood femininity and usually give a history of sexual arousal with cross-dressing. Nonhomosexual MF transsexuals are believed to seek sex reassignment because they are sexually attracted to the idea of becoming women, a paraphilic sexual interest that [Blanchard \(1989\)](#) called *autogynephilia*. The most common manifestation of autogynephilia is sexual arousal with cross-dressing, which is probably almost universal among nonhomosexual MF transsexuals, albeit not universally admitted ([Lawrence, 2004](#)). Homosexual MF transsexuals, however, are not believed to experience autogynephilia, so reports of sexual arousal with cross-dressing by ostensibly homosexual MF transsexuals are more difficult to explain. Nevertheless, several investigators have found that a minority of ostensibly homosexual MF transsexuals report sexual arousal with cross-dressing (see [Lawrence, 2004](#)), including [Smith et al. \(2005\)](#), who observed that nearly 30% of their ostensibly homosexual MF participants reported such arousal.

Many of these cases are probably attributable to nonhomosexual MF transsexuals who have not described their sexual orientation accurately. It is widely recognized that some nonhomosexual MF transsexuals inaccurately describe themselves as homosexual, occasionally in an attempt to deceive clinicians, but more commonly because they misinterpret sexual arousal to

the idea of being a woman having sex with a man as sexual arousal to the male somatotype ([Freund, 1985](#)). Because MF transsexuals whom clinicians would categorize as homosexual rarely report having had female sexual partners and almost never report having been married to women ([Bentler, 1976](#); [Blanchard et al., 1987](#)), MF transsexuals who report such a history and who describe themselves as homosexual probably have not described their sexual orientation accurately. [Lawrence \(2005\)](#) observed that, among seven MF transsexuals who reported sexual arousal with cross-dressing or cross-gender fantasy and who described their sexual orientation as homosexual, five reported having had female sexual partners and four reported having been married to women, thus casting doubt on the accuracy of their self-described sexual orientation. Because [Smith et al. \(2005\)](#) relied exclusively on self-reports to categorize their MF participants by sexual orientation, similar inaccurate description of sexual orientation may have occurred in their study. It is notable that 13 (21%) of their 61 ostensibly homosexual MF participants had been married to women, suggesting that these individuals probably had not accurately described their sexual orientation.

I hypothesized that in the [Smith et al. \(2005\)](#) study all or almost all of the ostensibly homosexual MF transsexuals who had been married to women or who reported having had female sexual partners probably were not genuinely homosexual and would therefore be disproportionately represented among the ostensibly homosexual MF participants who reported sexual arousal with cross-dressing, especially at higher frequencies of arousal. I contacted the corresponding author of the [Smith et al. \(2005\)](#) study to ask whether their data confirmed or disconfirmed my hypothesis.

The data I received in response to my inquiry (P. T. Cohen-Kettenis and B. P. C. Kreukels, personal communication, November 16, 2006) are summarized

Table 1

Sexual arousal with cross-dressing in MF transsexuals (Smith et al., 2005)

	Original categorization				Revised categorization				Recategorized MFs	
	H MFs <sup>a</sup>		NH MFs		H MFs		NH MFs			
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Always	2	3.3	3	5.8	1	2.7	4	5.3	1	4.3
Often	5	8.2	6	11.5	0	0.0	11	13.3	5	21.7
Sometimes	11	18.0	19	36.5	4	10.8	25	33.3	6	26.1
Never	40	65.6	16	30.8	29	78.4	27	36.0	11	47.8
Missing/NA <sup>b</sup>	3	4.9	8	15.4	3	8.1	8	10.7	0	0.0
Total	61		52		37		75		23	

Note: The original categorization was reported by Smith et al. (2005); the revised categorization reflects the assignment of MF transsexuals who reported sexual contact with women to the nonhomosexual group. One MF transsexual originally categorized as homosexual could not be assessed for recategorization, due to missing data.

<sup>a</sup> H = homosexual, NH = nonhomosexual, MFs = male-to-female transsexuals.

<sup>b</sup> NA = not applicable.

in Table 1, along with comparison data from Smith et al. (2005). Of the 61 MF participants originally categorized as homosexual, 23 (37.7%) reported previous sexual contact with women, including all those who had been married to women; these participants were consequently recategorized as nonhomosexual. Among the 23 recategorized participants, 12 (52.2%) reported sexual arousal with cross-dressing and six (26.1%) reported such arousal “always” or “often”; these percentages were very similar to those found in the original nonhomosexual participants, and the responses of the recategorized participants were not significantly different from those of the original nonhomosexual participants (Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test,  $P = .14$ ). In contrast, among the 37 self-described homosexual MF participants who did not report sexual contact with women, only five (13.5%) reported sexual arousal with cross-dressing and only one (2.7%) reported such arousal “always” or “often”. The responses of these participants were significantly different from those of the recategorized participants (Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test,  $P = .002$ ). These results are consistent with my hypothesis and suggest that many, if not most, cases in which sexual arousal with cross-dressing is reported by ostensibly homosexual MF transsexuals are attributable to persons who have inaccurately described their sexual orientation.

I also hypothesized that recategorizing the MF participants as described above might result in the Smith et al. (2005) data confirming the report by Blanchard et al. (1995) that homosexual MF transsexuals were shorter, lighter, and lighter in proportion to their height than nonhomosexual MF transsexuals. This hypothesis was not supported: Mean height, weight,

and body mass index for the recategorized homosexual MF participants were 1.77 m, 69.4 kg, and 22.37 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, versus 1.78 m, 71.0 kg, and 22.24 kg/m<sup>2</sup> for the recategorized nonhomosexual MF participants (P. T. Cohen-Kettenis and B. P. C. Kreukels, personal communication, November 16, 2006); all statistical comparisons were nonsignificant.

## References

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